

DWP Policy & Strategy Forum

1st December 2011

Note of meeting

Delegates

[...]

3 Work Experience and Work Placements for ESA work-related activity – XXXXXXX and XXXXX

XXXXXX gave a presentation about work experience and placements. This is a supportive measure and claimants will only be asked to do this where it is suitable in their personal circumstances. She also gave information about the safeguards which are in place, employment rights and general adviser training.

There was a discussion about whether claimants will merely be job-shadowing or doing a job of work, at what point it becomes work, and how this links with the Work Programme. It was felt that it will be confusing to claimants who may not understand what programme they are on. It was clarified that Work Programme providers are not currently putting people into work placements, and that DWP need to look at the way claimants move over to the Work Programme and how it is made clear they are moving. ESA claimants who enter the Work Programme already have a named contact in Jobcentre Plus.

It was also suggested that the Department should define what it means by work placement and publish a definition to ensure it is not misinterpreted.

The other main points made in the discussion session were as follows:

Access to Work is not available but it is difficult for some people to get work experience; they may need complex equipment or need taxis to get to work. These could be barriers for work providers.

We are focusing on this specific legislation for this discussion, but this is one of a number of a wide range of Work Related Activity options. Jobcentre Plus can also use the Flexible Support Fund to support claimants, and employers must make reasonable adjustments.

It would be useful if DWP produced a leaflet to help to ensure everyone understands their obligations under the Equality Act.

This was taken away for consideration.

It is important that DWP are clear about the terminology to be used.

Is there a maximum duration for this activity?

There are no plans to introduce a maximum time limit. No-one benefits from putting people into work placements that last a long time.

How many periods of work experience can people undertake?

The feeling is that there would not be much value to keep repeating the activity.

*What happens if a claimant does not want to do a work placement or wants to come off it?
Will there be sanctions?*

If it breaks down for good reason, why does there need to be a sanction provision?

Sanctions will be a barrier; there is a risk they may lose benefit.

If the placement is not working for good reason, for example, it was inappropriate, it will end. Ministers strongly feel there is a link-up to support those who are moving close to the labour market and the individual's responsibility to engage with the support. Ministers feel sanctions are an incentive for people to comply with their responsibility.

There is a real need for monitoring; some employers will exploit it.

It is not clear how this will be evaluated

There will be evaluation through statistics and possibly some qualitative research. There is an exit report on the Work Programme which will also give us some information.

For people with mental health issues it is essential that advice is sought from the claimant's health and care professionals.

A copy of XXXXX's presentation is attached.